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Is The Role Model Effect Related to The Motivation of Women Running for Office? An
Investigation of The Role Model Effect on Women in The Workforce

by

Courtney Lawrence

Under the Direction of Sarah-Allen Gershon, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the relationship between the role model effect, and the motivation of women running for office. Many studies have suggested that the role model effect is associated with women entering political races, since women become more politically ambitious when more female candidates appear on the ballot. However, the extant literature tends to have a general focus on younger women and girls as opposed to other groups of women. Therefore, this paper examines the ways in which the role model effect is experienced by women already in the workforce. Five female participants from the researcher's network, who occupy different professions in the workforce, were selected using the snowball sampling method to participate in in-depth interviews. These interviews were used to investigate if and how the role model effect influences women already in the workforce to enter the political arena.

INDEX WORDS: Role model effect, Relationship, Motivation, Run, Office, Female candidates, Qualitative study design, Investigate, Women, Workforce, Snowball sampling method, In-depth interviews.

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Investigation of The Role Model Effect on Women in The Workforce

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December 2021

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my family, and my friends for providing me with the strength and guidance to progress through this tedious journey in completing my paper. I would also like to show my appreciation for them allowing me the opportunity to express my ideas and thoughts regarding the aspects of this paper. I experienced many stressful moments and without the love and support from these lovely people, and the grace of God this would not have been possible. I am a thousand times grateful. Life is full of many tests, and I would like to say I passed this one.

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I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Sarah Gershon, Dr. Amy Steigerwalt, and Dr. Toby Bolsen for all their advice, patience, and encouragement throughout this difficult process. I would like to thank my loved ones for providing me with their love and support in overcoming the challenges that came with writing this paper. A special thanks goes out to the wonderful women that participated in my research study as well as to my supervisor at work, Tasha for always saying “we’re in this together”. With all their help and support, I was able to create something I am truly proud of.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAWP Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University.

CU Boulder University of Colorado Boulder

i.e. That is

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, the political ambition gender gap has largely caused a divide between the perceptions of officeholding for men and women. Women were historically far behind men at attaining elective office due to condescending stigmas that either undermined their character or discouraged the decision to run. However, this gap has drastically decreased over time. There has been a significant increase in the number of female candidates seeking office nationwide, given the influences of former female candidates such as Hillary Clinton, Stacy Abrams, and the outcome of our recent 2020 election with Kamala Harris becoming the first woman Vice President of the United States. Following the momentum of the recent election cycles of 2016, 2018, and 2020; women now make up over a quarter of members in the 117th Congress (Blazina and Desilver, 2021). Women also occupy 30% of statewide executive positions, 31% of state legislative seats, and 23% of seats in the local level.¹

These groundbreaking progressions build on the concept that holding political roles has become more acceptable for women, reflecting the reality that women do develop ambitions to run for office and can find support among voters (Wängnerud, 2009). Scholars propose that the political participation of women is heavily influenced by the gender of their representatives (Fox and Lawless, 2004; Lawless and Fox, 2010). This also fosters the idea of descriptive representation due to the theory that marginalized groups feel as though they can achieve their political interests by having a candidate of the same identity represent them (Burns, Scholzman, and Verba, 2001). Therefore, some of the motivation of women running for office stems from the availability of female political role models and not just gender biases (CAWP, 2018). Women's

¹ See "By the Numbers" section on the Represent Women Parity for Women in Politics website at: https://www.representwomen.org/current-women-representation#us_overview. Source: Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University (CAWP, 2018).

presence on the scene has motivated other women to enter political races. In fact, the role model literature suggests that women are more likely to consider running for office when female role models are visible within the political arena (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006).

The objective of this study is to examine the ways in which the role model effect nurtures a woman's interest to run for office, and to specifically investigate whether it applies to women already in the workforce. It seeks to answer my research question of:

Does the role model effect shape the motivation of women running for office for women in the workforce?

Past research primarily focuses on young women and girls when discussing the role model effect, since having someone to look up to and emulate encourages growth/success for younger generations. However, this narrow focus disregards how role models may play a similarly significant part in the aspirations of older women. This paper places emphasis on women in the workforce asserting that the role model effect following female political activity can motivate women who are already settled in their careers.

Utilizing a qualitative study design, five women were selected to participate in in-depth interviews. Inspired by Jessica Johnson's (2018) thesis design² participants were selected using the snowball sampling method with the distribution of recruitment flyers to women from the researcher's network who occupy different professions in the workforce. The study analyzes whether there is a relation involving female political role models and the motivation of women running for office. This qualitative research contributes to the previous literature by providing a different perspective of the role model effect and how it may shape the ambitions of women who

² See "Gender Inequality in the Workplace: The Experience of Female Administrators". Source: Jessica Johnson (2018).

are more established to run for office. I find it essential for my study to sample women settled in their careers given the effect of role models on various groups of people. Subsequently, it adds substance to women in politics scholarships addressing the intersections between women in the workforce and political ambition, while also laying the groundwork for future research. Ultimately, this study allows the opportunity for women to express their opinions about the prevalence of female candidates in the electoral process, and whether that offers a pathway for them to fulfill leadership positions in office.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Distinguishing the Role Model Effect

Per the wave of a record number of female candidates, there is a widespread belief that role models encourage women to enter politics. This is also referred to as the “role model” effect, since female politicians make other women consider their suitability to run for office. Political scientists posit that women become more knowledgeable and politically active when they are represented by women (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2007; Fridkin and Kenney, 2014). Campbell and Wolbrecht’s (2006) article find that visible female role models increase the likelihood for women and girls to express an incentive to achieve political careers. Further suggesting how visibility is important for women, because seeing women holding leadership positions in office fuels the motivation in other women to get on the ballot. In fact, Hoyt and Simon (2011) emphasize how role models are non-elite and easier to identify with. This means that women identify more with female leaders who are under-represented and not powerful elites given that they have a greater impact on women’s leadership perceptions and aspirations. Therefore, their study shows that the presence of female role models changes the self-perceptions

and aspirations of women, because they tend to have a more positive outlook in striving to run for office.

In reference to the role model effect causing the present-day surge of female candidates on the ballot, Wolbrecht and Campbell's 2017 experiment implemented a survey given to a national sample of 997 teens between the ages of 15-18 in the wake of the 2016 and 2018 election cycles. The experiment was conducted to determine whether they see a new faith in democracy due to more female candidates running, especially for younger women (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2019). Their study revealed a solid increase in Democratic girls' faith in American democracy if they reside in places where more Democratic women ran for office.³ Similarly, there was a more moderate increase among Democratic boys and Republican girls. The only outlier regarding what teens felt about politics was amongst Republican boys, who were more negative toward American democracy. According to the results, Wolbrecht and Campbell imply that female politicians have a positive effect on younger women's participation (as explained in Mariani, Marshall, and Mathew-Schultz's (2015) research). This provides an adequate observation of the role model effect and its attachment to the motivation of women running for office. But the scope is very limited considering that the role model effect can be applied to all women.

To broaden the focus of the role model effect on young women and girls, Ladam, Harden, and Windett's (2016) observational study examines how electing a female governor has a significant impact on the number of women running for the state legislature. They analyzed statistics from a database tracking female candidates that have both won and lost elections from all 50 states between 1978 to 2012. In addition to that, for the purpose of justifying that role

³ See *The Washington Post* article "How women candidates are making girls feel better about politics".

models sparks the emergence of female candidates, researchers from CU Boulder and Notre Dame attempted to delineate the advancement of the role model trend. Kuta's (2018) piece revealed that there is support for the idea that Hillary Clinton was symbolic to the growth in the number of female candidates based on the data collected from Ladam, Harden, and Windett's empirical study. The data indicates a rise in the number of female candidates per election year prior to more and more women running for office.⁴ It illustrates an upsurge in female candidates from 10 percent in 1990 to 23 percent in 2018. Even though it seems as though most of the augmentation accrued from female Democrats instead of female Republicans, Ladam et al (2016) still attest that electing women to prominent positions of office inspires the decision for other women to run.

The 2016 analysis also suggests that Hillary Clinton served as a role model for women to see themselves as a part of the electoral process. Moreover, these affirmations diversify definitive media narratives stating how Trump's victory following the 2016 presidential election resulted in many negative feelings towards his candidacy. This prompted the soar in the number of female candidates joining political races. On the condition of voters exhibiting different emotional reactions when it comes to specific candidates either winning or losing an election, Bonneau and Kanthak (2018) believes that a role model effect exists. They imply that perspectives about particular candidates determine whether that candidate is going to persuade others to develop candidacies of their own. The literature uses Hillary Clinton as a prime example for reviewing the ways in which the presence of women politicians increases a woman's motivation to run for office. For example, Clinton ran to become the first female president making candidate gender a critical predictor in the outcome of the 2016 election, since her

⁴ Data was presented in Sarah Kuta's (2018) article of "Women who run for office inspire others to do the same, study suggests". Source: OpenSecrets.org.

campaign ads consisted of broadcasting her in non-traditional settings such as speaking at large rallies or listening empathetically to people telling stories in reference to their struggles.

The evidence discloses that her candidacy boosted motivation for some female supporters. On a feeling thermometer scale, they expressed greater feelings of warmth towards Clinton, while men showed less content for her campaign. This represents how supporters possess more warm feelings towards the candidates that they like versus a candidate they would typically vote against. Bonneau and Kanthak also found that the role model effect was much greater regarding the context of the political ad. The subjects randomly viewed four treatment videos of Clinton known as caregiver, cookstoves, bullying, and fight. Specifically, the caregiver ad was associated with the largest increase in political ambition showing Clinton listening empathetically as a supporter tells a story. The cookstoves ad was associated with a smaller increase in political ambition showing Clinton discussing a policy with a small group just like the bullying ad showing Clinton listening empathetically to a girl but in front of a large crowd. Lastly, the fight ad was associated with no increase in political ambition showing Clinton targeting a huge crowd with the use of fighting metaphors.

The exposure to powerful female role models goes beyond the influence of Clinton's candidacy. For example, the 2018 midterm elections marked another "Year of the Woman" where we saw an influx of female candidates like Stacy Abrams, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib, Marsha Blackburn, Deb Haaland, Kyrsten Sinema, and so many more who ran reaching an all-time high (*The Washington Post*, 2018). Over 100 House seats that did not have an incumbent running for reelection, was the highest number of open seats ever in an election, and only being approached by those in the 1992 elections (Roll Call, 2018). Approximately 277 female candidates ran in the 2018 midterm elections with the goal of narrowing the prevalent gender gap

alongside feelings of resentment towards Trump's presidency.⁵ As a result, 125 female candidates won their elections solidifying how the role model effect accounts for achievement in the political arena amongst women.⁶ Furthermore, the role model effect resonates with Kamala Harris's triumph in becoming the 49th Vice President of the United States who is well-known as the first woman of both African American and South Asian heritage. In her acceptance speech, she remarks "every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities", reinforcing the notion that anything is possible. Researchers indicate that her breakthrough represents a milestone for women's motivation for future careers within the political field as well as the courage to attain leadership roles in government.

Elsesser's (2020) small excerpt, in *Forbes Magazine*, mentions five ways in which Harris's accomplishment shapes vigorous outcomes for both women and women of color. These outcomes involve greater female participation in politics, improvement of women's behavior on leadership tasks, reduction of stereotypes and gender biases, increases in career aspirations of women and girls, and greater female representation in government. She describes four studies that correspond to the ways that Kamala Harris as Vice President led to progressive results for women becoming political leaders. For example, one experiment that Elsesser depicted was conducted by Latu et al (2013). The experiment consisted of male and female students giving public speeches while being subtly exposed to either a picture of Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel, Bill Clinton, or no picture. Data was recorded according to the length of the speeches and the quality of the speeches given by participants. They found that women spoke less than men when a Bill Clinton picture or no picture was presented. This distinction disappeared when a picture of

⁵ The article "125 won their elections" in *The Washington Post* shows the results from the 2018 election.

⁶ *The Washington Post* (2018)

Hillary Clinton or Angela Merkel was presented. Therefore, women spoke more when they were exposed to a female role model compared to a male role model or no role models at all. The data also depicted that women not only gave longer speeches after seeing a photo of a woman, but they gave higher quality speeches hand in hand with giving their own speeches. Even so, higher ratings were achieved when female students were shown a photo of a woman. Conceptually, this signifies how women's political behaviors and self-evaluations can be triggered by the exposure to female political role models.

What this says about the role model effect is that role models give people a sense of encouragement to fulfill what is claimed as impossible or unattainable. The omnipresence of the role model effect undermines the arguments highlighted in studies like Foos and Gilardi (2020), Bamberger (2014), and Gilardi (2015). These studies propel how the role model effect happens to have some drawbacks in motivating women to run. Foos and Gilardi (2020) argue that female politicians who discuss their experiences bluntly can fail at motivating women to pursue a political career. They suggest that it all comes down to the message that role models are evoking. Bamberger (2014) also predicts that role models' experiences reveal the challenges encountered in other women's lives such as combining their career and private life. He infers that there is a possibility that the role model effect can make other women feel like they are less leaderlike than successful female leaders and that their goals are unreachable. While Gilardi (2015) indicates that female politicians are only beneficial at improving women's representation. Judging by the differences in these authors' opinions about female role models, they find the role model effect to have temporary relevance pertaining to women running for office or having a political career. Even though there are major setbacks regarding the role model effect, it is still important for women to see other women move up the ranks in the political field. Having more female

candidates run for office reflect how far women have come to be perceived as equal to their male counterparts in society. Ultimately, this contention solidifies my rationale for a significant relation between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office.

2.2 The Importance of Female Role Models for Women in the Workforce

“Seeing is Believing” is the phrase Warrell (2020) states in her article delving into how role models have a fundamental benefit on women in professional domains. This recounts for the evidence proclaiming that the role model effect is essential for women in the workforce. She discovers that women hearing stories of other women starting businesses and taking career risks helps to build their confidence and take “leaps of faith”. Generally speaking, females tend to underestimate their abilities as well as their strengths. Her piece juxtaposes with Sealy and Singh’s (2006) outline in which they discuss the importance of role models particularly for women in the workforce. They utilize the findings of recent research to develop an answer to questions regarding role models, identity formation, and senior management. For example, Ibarra (1999) argued that for women to acquire career success they must be clear and consistent with their identity. In other words, women should be themselves rather than act like something they are not just for the purpose of approval.

This alludes to the implications in Kanter’s (1977) scholarly work exemplifying how women “act like men” to give off favorable impressions to people in the workplace. To put it another way, masculine styles of management are necessary to be successful (Cames et al, 2001). Kanter conveys that expressing male characteristics makes women feel more favorable to themselves and to others. In observing asymmetric power in organizations hinged on the concepts of homophily and tokenism, he found that women are tokens in numerical minorities of less than 15%. For this reason, hiring people from marginalized groups (i.e., women) improves

the organization environment as explained in Kossek et al (2003) research. Likewise, Ely (1994) finds that the firms with fewer senior women or role models, women were least likely to experience gender as a positive basis for identification and more likely to perceive competition with women peers. Therefore, the lack of female role models constrains achievements for women in the workforce.

Given the strife that women endure within the workforce community, a Catalyst and Conference Board (2002) study cites that the absence of role models is a main barrier to women's career success. Using surveys and interviews sampling men and women who have job titles director level or above in 20 European countries, they uncovered five presumptive challenges that interfere with women's career advancement: stereotypes and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities, lack of senior or visibly successful female role models, lack of significant general management or line experience, commitment to family or personal responsibilities, and lack of mentoring. The results from both the surveys and interviews show the percentages of those who strongly agree/agree that these barriers are impactful to their advances in the career ladder.⁷ Stereotypes had the highest percentage compared to the other items, whereas more than half of respondents agreed that the lack of general management/line experience and commitment to family/personal responsibilities also had a negative effect on women's advancement. Thus, insisting that additional factors can be detrimental to female successes in the workplace.

A recent 2017 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center pinpoints the discrepancies faced by women in the work environment. The research reveals the percentages of

⁷ The results were displayed in "Women in Leadership: A European Business Imperative". Source: The Catalyst and Conference Board (2002)

employed workers who have experienced gender discrimination at work.⁸ Based on the results, the study finds that 42 % of working women said they have experienced gender discrimination at work, and about 22% of working men said the same. Graf et al's (2019) article mentions one of the most reported forms of discrimination known as wage inequality, which refers to the continual pay gap where men receive higher median wage earnings than women.⁹ About 25 % of women stated that they earned less than men doing the same job, while only 5% of men stated that they earned less than women. These findings suggest that females are deemed more qualified for lower-paying jobs than men. This accounts for the reasons of 23%, 16%, 10%, 9% and 7% of women saying how they were treated as if they were not competent, experienced but kept repeating small slights at work, been passed over for important assignments, felt isolated in the workplace, were denied promotions, and were turned down for jobs. Though only 4-6% of men said the same. In addition, 15 % of women received less support from senior leaders due to these other forms of discrimination, because they resulted in cynical perceptions about women's abilities to complete leadership tasks.

These types of prejudice are associated with fewer women in higher positions in the workplace. For example, women taking care of family and personal responsibilities such as marriage, childcare, and household can lead to interruptions in their career paths as well as professions. A 2013 Pew Survey found that women were more likely than men to say they had taken breaks from their careers to care for their family. 39% of mothers said that at some point in

⁸ The percentages of employed workers were illustrated in "The narrowing, but persistent, gender gap in pay". Source: Pew Research Center. Nikki Graf, Anna Brown, & Eileen Patten, Eileen. (2019).

⁹ See "The narrowing, but persistent, gender gap in pay" created by NIKKI GRAF, ANNA BROWN AND EILEEN PATTEN.

their work life they had taken a significant amount of time off or reduced their work hours. 42% said they had to care for a child or other family member, and 27% said they had quit work altogether to take care of these familial responsibilities. While, on the other hand, fewer men said the same in all categories. Therefore, balancing the weight of jobs and familial/ personal responsibilities are bound to clash, since it is tedious for women to keep up with both. Additionally, many women become “burnt out” and end up leaving the workforce completely (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). Women balancing the weight of their jobs and familial responsibilities is part of the reasoning for Graf et al’s (2019) literature conveying that women are overrepresented in occupations consisting of low pay, little advancement, and small assignments. Therefore, women holding lower-level occupations represent the constant push for gender equality given that both men and women are aware of the multiple inequalities in the workplace. Similarly, another study by the Pew Research Center indicates that 77% of women and 63% of men said this country needs to continue making changes to give men and women equality in the workplace. The study illustrates the need for female role models in the workforce to undermine views of incompetence and eliminate discouragement so women can surpass lower-level business positions. Horowitz et al’ s (2018) article argues that female business leaders have a relative advantage over men when it comes to aspects like valuing people from different backgrounds (35% say women are better at this, 3% say men are better), considering the impact business decisions have on society (33% vs. 8%), providing guidance or mentorship to young employees (33% vs. 9%), and finally providing fair pay and good benefits (28% vs. 5%).

Considering that researchers convey the advantages that women bring as leaders in the workforce, their research also suggests that other females having someone to look up to (i.e.,

female role models) helps them to believe in themselves. Female role models can relate to women who have dealt with the same challenges and experiences, because it is easier to idolize someone who has endured a similar path, struggle, and experience. On the account of the challenges that interfere with a woman's career advancement such as gender discrimination in the workplace or responsibilities within the household, female role models are symbolic in showing women that it is possible to achieve success despite the many hardships that might impact their career daily. This claim also coincides with the role model effect and how it relates to the motivation of women running for office given that female political role models present the image of a woman's capability of attaining positions of office as compared to men. Therefore, female role models are crucial in setting examples for all women instead of a specific group. Consequently, the role model effect may be applied to women in the workforce, because seeing female political role models could have the ability to inspire them to run for office.

2.3 The Role Model Effect Narrowing the Political Ambition Gender Gap

Historically, women's political ambition within the U.S. is linked with the gender gap, because it has contributed to the diminutive motivation for women entering electoral races. Over the last few decades, women have been least likely to run for office, because of perceptions constructed by gender stereotypes. These stereotypes categorize women as unfit for leadership roles and utterly confines them to traditional positions within the household. For a while, it was believed that the political arena was simply "a man's world" even though women tend to have equal chances of winning elections in conjunction with their male counterparts (Lawless & Pearson, 2008). If women did decide to run, they would stick to attaining lower-level positions of office such as city councils and mayoral seats, because it was always the easier route for success

in the political field. In addition, the incumbency advantage thwarted electoral opportunities as well as hindered the pace for substantial gains (Palmer and Simon, 2008; Carroll and Jenkins, 2003; Burrell, 1996; Darcy et al, 1994). Thus, profound barriers like confidence gaps, lack of resources, and lack of empowerment have suppressed the overall interest in a woman's attempt to run for office or even re-election.

Even though this happens to be true in most cases, political science scholarships have determined that the role model effect is effective in "getting past the gender gap" (Pate and Fox, 2018). This is to the degree of which one can extrapolate that there is a meaningful relationship between the role model effect and the motivation to run for office relative to women. For example, Schier (2020) investigates how role models affect the competitiveness of both men and women in a laboratory experiment. Each subject was assigned to three treatments of observing a female role model, a male role model, and no role model in performing simple math tasks under different compensation schemes. His study found that women's willingness to compete increases in the face of both a male and female role model, yet female role models actually boost a women's self-confidence. This underscores how in politics, female political role models can increase a woman's motivation to run due to elevating beliefs in their ability to attain office (Schier, 2020). Horvath's (2018) research suggests that women's presence in political groups causes a huge escalation in political self-efficacy in the electorate. As a result, the role model effect narrows the political ambition gender gap, because female political role models help women assess their qualifications to run for office in a more positive manner. In other words, women happen to be very "strategic" in their decisions to run, because they tend to take all negative evaluations into consideration (Roberts, 1991). However, with more female candidates

running for office, women can think more positively about their chances of winning without weighing the costs and benefits so much.

Following this reason, studies like Meier et al (2018) discovered that female role models mitigate gender stereotype threats and lead to higher confidence in oneself. For instance, a study co-authored by Esther Duflo surveyed attitudes on education and achievement for families with children in 495 villages in the West Bengal region of India. She found that the ambition gender gap in educational goals disappeared in areas with long-serving female politicians in local government. The girls had set higher goals for themselves, and parents were 25% more likely to report ambitious education goals for their daughters (Pereira, 2012). This affirms that the role model effect can not only increase ambitions but conveys the notion that women can be seen as leaders who can achieve anything they set their minds to. Costantini's (1990) piece assumes that both men and women do not want the same thing. His study indicates that the ambition gap narrowed over time since female political activists became driven with self-advancement within the political arena. Therefore, women desire to have political advancement whether it be running for office or pursuing a political career. The eagerness for political advancement also accounts for many female political role models running in elections. With that being the case, the role model effect closes the ambition gender gap, because women can move up in the ranks and take on higher positions of office.

Moreover, the literature about the role model effect refutes arguments brought up in contrasting research. Distinctive research asserts that women are "conflict averse, competition averse, and election averse" (Miller, Danaher, and Forbes, 1986; Croson and Gneezy, 2009; Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007; Schneider et al, 2016; Kanthak and Woon, 2015), because what we see is happening now is women putting themselves through to elections. For example, the

influence of female leaders like Kamala Harris, Hillary Clinton, Stacey Abrams, and so many others (as I mentioned before) having ran in elections displays how much the political world has changed in terms of gender parity. Women holding higher positions of office have reached an immense level of acceptance to where potential female candidates do not have to be as concerned with the challenges that come with running for office or even maintaining their positions (i.e., re-election). As a result of this, we can conclude that there is a relationship between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office, since female political role models have been beneficial in helping women overcome the ambition gender gap.

3. THEORY

3.1 The Motivational Theory of Role Modeling

Role models are often characterized as individuals who motivate others to set and achieve various goals. Shapiro et al (1978) coined the term and defined it as “individuals whose behaviours, personal styles and specific attributes are emulated by others”. This emphasizes how role models serve different functions at influencing what people aspire to do as well as be representations of what is possible (Morgenroth et al, 2015). Hence, this concept refers to the theoretical framework of the Motivational Theory of Role Modeling. This theory builds on the motivational processes of role aspirants, since role models have a great impact on their expectancies, values, and goals. Morgenroth et al (2015) expands on the role model literature by providing a better understanding of the processes through which role models effectively

influence role aspirants' goals and ambitions.¹⁰ They outlined three interconnected themes associated with the influence of role models known as: behavioral models, representations of the possible, and inspirations. Role models as behavioral models are identified as those from whom we learn skills and behaviors. Role models possess skills and qualities that other actors feel they lack, so by observing and comparing their performance they can learn (Kemper, 1968). For example, Ibarra and Petriglieri (2008) depict role models as being successful in a profession, because they are assimilated by those who desire to occupy professional roles. This conveys the belief of following in one's footsteps toward success.

For this reason, Gibson's (2004) article distinguishes the cognitive process of how individuals choose role models from the people they observe rather than on the actions of the role models themselves. In his (2003) article, he outlines the degree of which individuals adapt and reject attributes of multiple role models. By examining career stage differences ranging from early to late, he found that the early career (*acquiring stage*) consists of role aspirants working on a viable self-concept in emulating others, using positive, close role models along with a range of attributes to construct a professional identity. The mid-career (*refining stage*) is where individuals seek to refine their self-concepts; in which they select specific attributes from role models that are still relatively positive. Finally, in the late career (*affirming stage*), individuals enhance and affirm the self-concept through learning specific skills tied to specific goals. Thus, he argues that aspirants think they are sufficiently like others in their environment that they can observe and most importantly emulate. Role models as representations of the possible overtakes the assertions made by Gibson (2003), because they not only reinforce an individual's

¹⁰ "The Motivational Theory of Role Modeling: How Role Models Influence Role Aspirants' Goals" explains how role models can change the perception of goals and goal-related behaviors. Source: Thekla Morgenroth, Michelle K. Ryan, & Kim Peters (2015).

preexisting goals, but they allow them to adopt new goals. For example, McIntyre, Paulson, Taylor, Morin, and Lord (2011) insist that role models send the message of “I can do this, so you can do this too”. This message gives individuals reassurance that they can achieve what is deemed as unattainable or impossible. As a result of this, we see representations of the possible specifically with women, because they are constantly judged by society on what they can and cannot do. For this reason, role models symbolize pinnacles of hope for those who are stigmatized.

The literature suggests the reasoning for role models being perceived as inspirations, because role models are people, we tend to base our evaluations on. As a matter of fact, Morgenroth et al (2015) infers that we are concerned with what makes a desirable character given the traits, values, aspirations that seem to all else work in our favor. Therefore, role aspirants become inspired to be more like the role model and set his or her goals accordingly (Morgenroth et al, 2015). Relatively, this contention coincides with the expectancy-value theories of motivation where people are motivated to achieve particular goals drawn from their goal expectations and values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Role aspirants who are inspired to be like their role model will also set their expectations and values accordingly since they are trying to attain their level of success. Given the clear depiction of the impact of role models on role aspirants, the motivational theory of role modeling provides a novel approach to looking at the ways role models motivate individuals to accomplish their goals. It states: The power of role models can be utilized to increase role aspirants' motivation (Morgenroth et al, 2015). In striving to answer my research question (*see Introduction*), I argue that the role model effect may explain the motivation of women running for office.

4. METHODOLOGY

To explore the relationship between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office, this study utilized a qualitative study design inspired by Jessica Johnson's (2018) thesis design. Participants were selected using the snowball sampling method with the distribution of recruitment flyers to women from the researcher's network who occupy different professions in the workforce along with those women gathering potential members of their own.¹¹ The timeline for data collection lasted about two months. A total of 5 women from the researcher's network were selected to participate in in-depth interviews via Zoom Meeting.¹² The sample included minority women from two racial backgrounds (African American/Hispanic). Four of the women interviewed were a part of the 30-55 age bracket, while one participant was from the 18-24 age group.

These women were sent an email (i.e., email for interested participants)¹³ introducing myself, explaining the purpose of the project, and recommending each person to fill out both the interview sign up form and the informed consent form.¹⁴ Upon participants filling out both forms, I sent them another email (i.e., email about Zoom interview) outlining all the details such as a date and time to schedule the interview.¹⁵ The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis expected to last 30 to 60 minutes. During each interview process, I followed an interview script.¹⁶ The interviews were audio-recorded via my smartphone device. The questions raised

¹¹ Appendix A

¹² I attempted to sample 20 female participants. Potential subjects declined for various reasons including but not limited to their work schedules.

¹³ Appendix B

¹⁴ Appendix B.1 & B.2

¹⁵ Appendix C

¹⁶ Appendix D

were aimed to validate the claims posed in my research question.¹⁷ After each interview concluded, a thank you email was sent out expressing my appreciation for each respondent's participation.¹⁸ For more information about the procedures regarding the study (see *Appendix B.2*).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Five in-depth interviews were conducted to examine the relationship between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office specifically for women in the workforce. Each interview question was geared towards understanding the link between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office for women in the workforce. I further wanted to learn more about participants' perceptions of both female professional and political role models. If the participants had a view of female political role models similar to female professional role models who might have inspired them to pursue a specific career path, then seeing female political role models may be more likely to motivate them to run for office. My results show there may be a limited relationship between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office. The interview responses convey that female political role models can motivate women to run for office, but on a small-scale level.

The study results allow for an examination of my theory and research question. First and foremost, my theory states: The power of role models can be utilized to increase role aspirants' motivation (Morgenroth et al, 2015). The primary focus of the interviews was to probe whether female political role models motivate women to run for office. I asked three critical

¹⁷ Appendix D

¹⁸ Appendix E

questions to examine this phenomena. I started off by asking, ***“Have female politicians or the ones you mentioned in the previous question ever sparked an interest in you to run for office? Why or Why not?”***. Most of the respondents expressed that female politicians did not spark an interest to run for office given the following statements:

“No, they have not sparked an interest to run for office, but they do spark an interest for me to be more engaged and involved in politics. I am a registered Democrat, and I am all about donating, getting out there to vote, and talking about candidates.”- Respondent 2

“No not right now, what they have done for me is making sure that my vote counts.”- Respondent 3

“I support female politicians but not on the basis of sparking an interest in me to run for office.”- Respondent 4

These responses suggest that female politicians are admired for what they do for women rather than sparking an interest to run for office. For example, Respondents 2 and 3 mentioned that female politicians spark an interest in being more involved in politics, whereas Respondent 4 did not go into much detail about what female politicians do for them except to say that they are supportive of female politicians. Respondents 1 and 5 replies to this question were interesting. Instead of discussing whether female politicians sparked an interest in her to run for office, Respondent 1 described how she would be interested in running for office due to not agreeing with many of the political laws.

“I have never tried to run for office, but by seeing the way society is now if I tapped into it more, I think I would want to. I would also do more research, because I do not agree with a lot of political laws. One of the things I do not agree with is minimum wage, because I think it should be increased across the board. Another thing I do not agree with

is laws dealing with police brutality. Recently, I was in a car accident and the police judged that I was at fault for it which I felt was unfair. So, there are a lot of things that, if I could, I would change.”- Respondent 1

Her response depicts how the interest to run for office does not always stem from the gender/identity of our representatives, because it can emerge from our beliefs or issues with the government. Additionally, the response illustrates how ideological orientations influence political attitudes/behaviors concerning aspects such as issue positions (Jost et al, 2009).

Female political role models may not always motivate women to run for office, but they can motivate women to engage in political arena in other ways. For example, Respondent 5 tells a clear story about how one female politician motivated her to run for a student government position.

“Back in 1985/1986, Geraldine Ferraro ran for Vice President when I was in the 6th or 7th grade. I met her, Jesse Jackson, and Max Cleveland at a political event that I was invited to. I think as a child, she inspired me, but it was broader. Female politicians like Geraldine Ferraro made me feel like I could do absolutely anything I wanted. Being an African American woman meeting her back then and going to a majority school, I saw her position in running as an opportunity for all women to pursue that if they desired to. So yes, it did spark an interest towards all sorts of things. I think in college I ran for Student Senator, but it was not anything that was an aspiration of mine. However, I do not want to belittle that experience.”- Respondent 5

This shows how female political role models can ignite an interest in women to do other things that are sometimes beyond the political field. Furthermore, the effect of female political role models may be broader given that Respondent 5 was encouraged to run for a student

government position. As this interviewee indicates, the impact of female political role models may exceed the political ambitions of women in the workforce, inspiring as Respondent 5 puts it “all women to pursue political office if they desired to”. The responses here illustrate a complicated picture of the role model effect. Specifically, the interviews indicate that female political role models may provoke an interest for more political engagement for women in the workforce rather than running for office.

The next question I asked was, “*Do you feel like having female political role models boosts your confidence to run for office?*”. Three respondents stated that female political role models would boost their confidence to run for office. Respondent 1 stated, “I feel like female political role models would boost my confidence to run for office, especially if we share the same views.” Respondent 3 commented, “Absolutely! It goes back to when you see women in office, you can see what you can be. In other words, it is feasible if I work hard to get there.” Respondent 5 conveyed,

“Yes, it has boosted my confidence, because I do not have a lack of confidence to run. I never thought I could not run because I am a woman. I think more than anything, with politicians like Geraldine Ferraro, Kamala Harris, and Hillary Clinton, my expectation would be that we should have more female political leaders in upper political circles.

Even now, if I had a desire to do it, being an African American woman would not be a hindrance to having confidence in running for office.”

Respondent 1 indicated that female political role models would boost her confidence to run for office if they share the same views. Scholarly literature often finds that similarities between candidates and citizens can affect political behaviors. For example, Van Erkel’s (2019) case study investigated voting behaviors based on voter-candidate similarities. He discovered that

citizens are more likely to cast preferential votes when there are candidates or party leaders like themselves. While not focused on women in the workforce, this and other research indicates that candidates heavily influence citizens when it comes to political behaviors such as voting, political participation, and running for office.

Respondent 3 also felt like female political role models would boost her confidence to run for office, because seeing women running for office helps other women feel like they can too. This circles back to the argument made by Morgenroth et al (2015) that role models are characterized as representations of the possible, because they give others reassurance on what they can achieve. Respondent 5 discusses how because of her race and gender; she does not lack confidence to run for office. Her discussion outlines how the intersection between race and gender are contingent upon women of color (Hancock, 2004; Hawkesworth, 2003; Crenshaw, 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981), meaning that race and gender may shape a boost in confidence and increased political ambition. Race and gender also account for why we see a lot of minority/female candidates emerge in political elections.

Unlike Respondents 1, 3, and 5, Respondents 2 and 4 did not think that female political role models would boost their confidence to run for office. Most notably, Respondent 2 had a different opinion on where confidence comes from. She expressed,

“No, they have not boosted my confidence to run for office, because I think confidence comes from within. It is hard for me to have someone else help me be more confident, because it is either I am confident or not. It does help me be more engaged in the political process.”

One could argue that confidence does not develop from seeing people who you might look up to, because it can emerge from what you desire to accomplish. Respondent 2 thinks the confidence

to run for office comes from within yourself and not others. She also mentions how female political role models motivate her to be more involved in the political process.

Respondent 4's response was also intriguing, because she believes that female political role models generally boost her confidence. Her statement that, "I would say not to boost my confidence to run for office, but they do boost my confidence in general.", emphasizes how female political role models can boost a woman's confidence outside of running for office. Therefore, after her commentary about confidence, Respondent 2 goes on to say that female political role models help her to be more engaged in the political process. Their responses suggest that female political role models can motivate women in the workforce beyond inspiring them to run for office or engage in politics.

This aspect of the interview was compelling because the conversation about female political role models boosting confidence was diverse. Female political role models cannot largely be linked with boosting confidence among the interviewees since it depends on the type of person and how they perceive confidence. Generally, some of the women interviewed did not need to have a role model present to boost their confidence, because they are already confident people. In addition to this, Respondent 4 stated that female political role models boost her confidence in general, which illustrates how female political role models motivate women in other ways than running for office. Overall, the interviews suggest that women in the workforce look at female political role models in ways that may be different than what is often described in existing research.

Existing research reveals that women's presence in politics positively impacts the political ambition, efficacy, and future support of other women (Costa & Wallace, 2021). The respondents all agreed on female political role models boosting their confidence to run, but

Respondent 1 took an alternative approach with how her political views should align with a female political role model. While Respondent 3's remarks were similar to Morgenroth's assertion about role models (i.e., representations of the possible), and Respondent 5 addressed race and gender and how that would not dispel her confidence in running for office if she wanted to.

Apart from female political role models boosting the confidence to run for office for women in the workforce, another question that had been beneficial in building on my theory was, *"Do you think having female political role models would motivate you to run for office?"*. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Two respondents thought female political role models would motivate them to run for office, while the other two respondents thought female political role models would not motivate them to run for office. Respondents 1 and 3 said,

"Yes, at some point in time. I would have to get out of my insecurity shell but seeing a woman who might be a bit like myself who at one point felt like her views did not matter and she went, ran, and won would show how if you are passionate about something go do it!"- Respondent 1

"You know what, I think I would because every year, every election, it has become more and more important to me about the results of an election. Seeing people like Michelle and Kamala shows that women collaboratively can make a difference. And I do not want it to completely be women, because I think there needs to be a balance between men and women as well as all races. This is so there is equal representation and that is what would pull me to run for office."- Respondent 3

While Respondents 2 and 4 communicated,

“Personally, not me, because of who I am, but I think they motivate other women in general to run for office.”- Respondent 2

“A female political role model would not motivate me to run for office, because that is not my career trajectory. Also, it is not the fact that they are females that would not motivate me to run for office; it is just that type of career. If I were in that career path, then I would see it as a motivator to run.”- Respondent 4

Respondent 1 mentioned that female political role models would motivate her to run for office at some point in time. She notes that seeing a woman like herself running for office and winning would make her passionate about running as well. This speaks to my theory, because one can infer that female political role models help women in the workforce become passionate about running for office. In addition, it represents the idea of descriptive representation since having more women in positions of power changes women’s attitudes towards attaining political office (Hinojosa, 2021). Respondent 3 touched on the theme of equal representation. She said having female political role models shows that women can make a difference within the political field, yet she feels like everyone (both genders, all races) should be represented in government equally. This suggests that female political role models motivate women in the workforce to run for office due to the desire to have equal representation of women in politics. Studies also find that more representation of women in politics matters (Nikos-Rose & Davis, 2020), which means that equal representation of women can be deemed as one of the biggest motives for women being motivated to run for office. Therefore, these responses imply that the motivation of women to run for office can be dependent on representation whether it be equal, descriptive, or even substantive representation.

In contrast to Respondents 1 and 3, Respondents 2 and 4 disagreed with female political role models motivating them to run for office. Respondent 2 conveyed how running for office is not something that relates to who she is. Her comment coincides with Walsh's (2012) piece, because people make sense of politics with who they are. The interest to run can be weighed upon one's identity versus things like political issues, representation, and ideology. With Respondent 2 saying that running for office does not resonate with her identity, it shows how women in the workforce may not want to run because holding office does not line up with who they are. On the other hand, Respondent 4 stated that running for office is not part of her career trajectory. Her reference to career trajectory reveals illustrates that not everyone is interested in having a political career, because it is either not a part of their career goals/aspirations or it may not be what they are passionate about. She went on to say that if being in the political field was a career path for her, then she would see it as a motivator to run for office. As a result, one could argue that women in the workforce may not want to run for office given that they have a dissimilar career trajectory, or they are already satisfied with the career path they chose.

Respondent 5 happened to be the odd one out, because she neither agreed/disagreed that female political role models would motivate her to run for office. She noted, "We'll see. I have a friend who is about to run for mayoral office next year and she asked for my support. We'll see how that experience goes", which illustrates how women in the workforce may not be motivated to run for office because they have to experience what it is like first. In addition, maybe that experience must be through other individuals before deciding to run for themselves. This relates to Mansbridge's (1999) literature, because shared experiences between representatives and their constituents strengthens their ambition to run. Given the effect of

female political role models, women in the workforce may not be completely opposed to running for office since they might share the same experiences with the female political role models they look up to.

Respectively, it is probable for women in the workforce to think that female political role models would not motivate them to run for office due to running not being incompatible with their type of character or not pursuing a career path in the political system. This suggests that even though women in the workforce look up to female political role models, it does not mean that they would be motivated to run for office. On the contrary, it could also mean that to be motivated to run for office, they would have something in common with a female political role model they look up to. Therefore, women could be motivated to run for office for different reasons counter to the influence of female political role models. Most of all, these three critical questions justify that female political role models can indeed motivate women in the workforce to run for office, but to a certain extent.

Shifting the focus onto my observations. There are numerous observations I have following the results of my research. The first and second section of the interview primarily focused on learning more about my respondents' perceptions of both professional and political female role models. I asked two major questions seeing that all respondents viewed both professional and political female role models similarly. First, I asked, ***“Do you think that it is important to have professional female role models in the workforce? How so?”***. Two respondents explained how it was important to have professional female role models because as a society we do not see many females in leadership positions in the workplace.

“Yes, I feel like there should be more professional female role models since most Fortune 500 companies are male-dominated. We do not see as many females, so having

professional female role models encourages women across the globe to step into more prominent roles.”- Respondent 1

“I think it is important to have professional female role models, because given our current society we do not have that many, which is why we have a lot of issues where women are being underpaid. For example, even if they get certain positions there is a huge wage gap between them and their male counterparts. To see a woman in a position where they are being paid fairly is very important, because it inspires other women to achieve that as well.”- Respondent 4

Both responses are fascinating because they discuss women’s underrepresentation throughout the corporate ladder. Many companies are male-dominated and fail to promote women into senior/management roles. A study conducted by McKinsey & Company (2021) revealed that women are still promoted at lower rates than their male counterparts. This is despite them taking on extra work. For this reason, we see a persistent gap between men and women when it comes to the workplace. For example, Respondent 4 mentions the wage gap with how women are constantly underpaid regardless of the positions they hold at a company. This may explain why women are doing more to advance diversity, equity, inclusion in the workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2021). The gap also fosters the reasoning for women in the workforce thinking it is important to have professional female role models. They tend to encourage other women to achieve higher level positions in the workplace as well.

Two other respondents conveyed how they think professional female role models are important, because they have women leaders.

“I think it is important to have professional female role models in the workforce, because I have been in Corporate America for more than 30 years. A good portion of that, I

worked for women. I had women leaders, which is very ironic, because that is not always the case.”- Respondent 2

“I absolutely think it is important because that is one of the ways we can see a future for ourselves. I think one of the best things about my job now is my upper leadership. My direct manager is the CFO, and she is a woman. There had been other people prior to her taking that position who were males, and she had out accomplished all of them due to her decisions and moves. I really look up to her because she motivates me to work extra hard to achieve more. Also, because she is a woman, it gives me that extra push to move up in my career.”- Respondent 3

Respondent 2 expressed that throughout her 30-year experience in the workforce, she worked for women and had women leaders. She found it to be very ironic because that is not always the case. In making that statement, she was referring to how many women do not hold leadership positions within Corporate America. Therefore, it is very difficult to find women who have reached that level of success in the workplace. As a result of this, she thinks it is important to have professional female role models. She even stated,

“I had women in my management roles a lot of the time, especially when I was younger in my 20’s, so I learned a lot from women leaders who gave guidance about how to maneuver corporate politics. I think it is important for young women to see other women in those roles and then for those women who have gone before them to offer that guidance and advice if needed.”- Respondent 2

Respondent 3 described a woman leader who happens to be her manager. She goes into detail about how she inspired her, which depicts the importance of professional female role models and how they inspire women to expand their career in any way they desire to.

Respondent 5's opinion was yet again divergent from the others, because she believes that professional female role models are needed to provide a balance in the workforce. Additionally, she comments on how they offer different perspectives and sets of experiences, saying "Yes absolutely! Professional female role models provide balance because they offer a different perspective and set of experiences." This emphasizes the importance of gender representation in the workplace. For example, InHerSight surveyed more than 2,000 women about the importance of gender representation and women role models in the workplace (Castle, 2021). The study results indicate that gender representation matters to working women, since 84 percent of women said it's important or very important to see women filling leadership roles where they work, 78 percent of women said it's important or very important to see women performing the same work as them, and 54 percent of women said they have a woman role model at work. It symbolizes the reason for Respondent 5 saying that professional female role models are important for maintaining gender equality throughout the workforce. As far as offering a different perspective and set of experiences, Lisa Smith, director of the Raleigh/Durham chapter of Women Who Code, quoted that "you have to see it to be it". This suggests that seeing women in leadership roles in the workforce gives off the perspective that it is achievable for other women to fulfill more established positions. Professional female role models' experiences in the workforce can also resonate with other women and motivate them to achieve more in terms of their careers.

The respondents do not only find professional female role models to be important, but they also feel the same way about political female role models. The question that was essential in legitimizing this claim was, *"Given the recent election cycles, how do you feel about more female candidates running for elective office or actually holding higher positions of office?"*.

All respondents were satisfied in seeing more female candidates running for office judging by the following statements:

“I think that it is a great change to see. A lot of times with being a woman, men tend to think that we are going to act on our emotions. But if you go back to history there were a lot of women who held powerful roles and did not let their emotions get in the way of making effective and possibly hard decisions. I think we need to shake up the political world and encourage more women to step forth to higher positions of office.”-

Respondent 1

“I think that it is a good thing. I was joking with a friend of mine about how during the last election cycles all these scholars were trying to interpret what the Constitution meant. I said if there were more women back then involved in the drafting of the Constitution and there had been some “founding” mothers then the Constitution may have had more clarity as far as I am concerned. I think as women, we tend to question things more like what it means, what about that, what if this happens, or what if that happens, etc. I do not think we would have any ambiguity if more women were involved in the Constitution, so I think women in politics is a plus. It is a plus, because we look at multiple scenarios in which you get a better outcome given that there is a broader perspective.”- Respondent 2

“Honestly! I am rooting for Michelle Obama to become the next President. I look at her as a well-rounded, intelligent person. Even looking at other female candidates, I see that they look at the whole picture and provide a different perspective. I cannot imagine not having female politicians, because I was born in the 60s and you did not see a lot of women in the higher positions of office.”- Respondent 3

“I think knowing that there have been more female candidates running is very important, because even with Hillary Clinton she did not win against Trump, but she still inspires other women to run. Another person I can think of who not only represents women, but also Latinx people is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She is a well-known representative who does empower women to run, and they should since women are perfectly capable of being in politics.”- Respondent 4

“We always need a balanced workforce, and I think that women bring a different perspective and set of experiences that serve our communities.”- Respondent 5

The most thought-provoking factor about these responses is that they were all distinctive in content. Respondent 1 addressed this question from a gender disparity standpoint. She indicates that men tend to think women are emotional in nature and act solely based on their emotions. This stereotype rains true in reference to politics because political science research posits that female candidates are characterized to be “warm, nurturant, affectionate, and emotional” (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Therefore, they are more capable of dealing with issues of healthcare, childcare, and the environment. Respondent 1 refuted this notion. She explained how if you go back and observe history, there were plenty of women in leadership roles who did not let their emotions get the best of them. Although she does not give any examples of any women in particular, she denoted how their emotions did not prevent them from making difficult but effective decisions. This implies how female candidates are not what stereotypes say they are.

Respondent 2 felt like more female candidates running for office or holding higher positions was a good thing, because women offer a broader perspective when it comes to political topics. For example, she discusses the drafting of the Constitution and how they should have been some “founding” mothers. She argues that the involvement of women in the drafting

of the Constitution would have alleviated any ambiguity to the point where scholars would not have to question its clarity. In addition, she pinpoints how women are more skeptical when involved in topics of uncertainty. She believes women tend to analyze multiple possibilities and scenarios that lead to a better outcome of the problem at hand.

Respondent 3's response expands on the response of Respondent 2, because she not only mentions how female candidates provide a different perspective, but she discusses how there were not a lot of female candidates when she was growing up in the 60's. In other words, it was not the norm. Today, she cannot imagine not seeing female candidates, because she points out how she admires Michelle Obama. She found female candidates to be important, because they show how far women have come regarding representation. Comparatively, Respondent 4 presented some examples of female candidates such as Hillary Clinton and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to indicate that female candidates are capable of being in politics.

Respondent 5 responded the same way she did in the previous question, which implies that female political role models allow women to see what they can achieve in terms of politics and their experiences can also motivate women to acquire more in their political career or insomuch as run for office.

Notably, most of the respondents talked about women of color being the politicians that inspire other women to run for office. This could be in part with the respondents being minority women since researchers posit that racial minorities perceptions involving running for office is based on the elected leadership and concentration of their racial/ethnic group in their area (Shames, 2015). As a result, we see women of color running in places where minority women have held political power. Branton (2009) even contends that district-level race and ethnicity are associated with minority candidate emergence. This relates to political empowerment, because

women become empowered by other women to get involved in the political process given that it is important to see someone of their identity represent them (Burns, Scholzman, and Verba, 2001). Furthermore, it makes them feel like their beliefs, values, and issues matter in terms of governance. Therefore, Shames (2015) literature declares that race and gender intersect in subject to women of color, because both are responsible for higher and lower political ambition. To sum it all up, minority women can be motivated to run for office considering that they have women of color representing them in the electorate.

This second question (i.e., Given the recent election cycles, how do you feel about more female candidates running for elective office or actually holding higher positions of office?) affirms that respondents feel the same way about political female role models as they do with professional female role models. I presumed that if they thought that more female candidates running or holding higher positions of office was a good thing, then they would view them as being political female role models for women. Also leading into the next question, I asked, ***“Do you characterize female candidates as being role models for women in general? Why or why not?”***. All respondents were in accordance with the fact that female candidates are role models for women in general. Here, there was not much of a difference in opinion except with Respondents 2 and 5’s point of view.

“Most Definitely! Especially since there are not enough of us seen in higher political positions.”- Respondent 1

“I think female candidates are role models, but I have mixed feelings on the concept of role models. I think people are in positions where they can be role models, but society puts too much pressure on people in positions of notoriety, popularity, and power to be role models for everyone. For instance, I do not have children, but I feel if I had children

then I would not have the expectation that a politician, athlete, singer, or movie star should have the responsibility to be my child's role model. I feel like that is relinquishing some of my responsibility. I think each person has a responsibility on who they are going to look up to. If I am impressed with how someone carries themselves, what they support, what they are fighting for, or what their agendas are, then I would view them as being a role model for me. Just because a person has achieved a certain level of success doesn't mean they should be role models for everyone else. At the end of the day, female candidates are role models, but I feel like society places them in that role.”- Respondent 2

“Absolutely! I think that it is very important to have somebody in politics who has walked the same paths or who has had the same struggles. You are seeing it everywhere women who are just as intelligent and experienced to reach higher positions of office whereas years before that it was not the norm. So, by seeing women take on higher positions, other women think that this can be a reality for me.”- Respondent 3

“I think so since we have societal norms expressing that women should not have higher positions of power. I actually remember watching a documentary called “Bringing Down the House”, which followed four or five candidates and talked specifically about how they empowered people around them.” – Respondent 4

“I think they can. We must be objective and realize that everyone will not present our personal views. However, when we think of role models, we think that they are good people to follow. Sometimes they are people we need to watch, because everyone is an example whether it be good or bad. Just like we have great/ awful men who hold office, the same thing goes for women. Therefore, we need to be objective about what our takeaways are from what female candidates do.”- Respondent 5

Similar to her stance on confidence in the third section, Respondent 2 provided a contradictory perspective on the concept of role models. She commented that society puts pressure on people in positions of power to be role models. She felt like society disregards the whole meaning of what a role model is, because it should be centered on an individual's assessment of someone as opposed to what the media portrays. This happens to be true, because a lot of times, the media makes people out to be more than what they are according to their accomplishments (Kedzior, 2019). Also resulting in popular people feeling responsible for upholding a certain persona within the public eye (Crosbie, 2012). Following this reason, she summarized how each person has a responsibility to decide who they are going to look up to. Thus, she concluded that female candidates are role models, but society are the ones that place them in those roles. This emphasizes how the concept of role models can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the individual. Furthermore, role models or people who are perceived to be role models do not always inspire individuals in the way we think they do. Therefore, the perception of role models must be taken into consideration. In reference to the role model effect, female candidates can be identified as role models for women, but it all comes down to who women define as being political role models for them.

Respondent 5 thinks that female candidates are role models as well, but she feels like people need to be objective about who they decide to support. She suggests that not all female candidates are going to meet political interests nor are they going to be great officeholders. Therefore, individuals need to be rational about what is being displayed by female political role models. It is equivalent to what Respondent 2 says about female political role models, since she believes that society places them in these positions. Respondent 5 conveys how individuals base their evaluation of female political role models on what they have achieved versus what they are

doing as officeholders or as someone running for office. Ultimately, the interview responses here reveal how female candidates are viewed by the respondents as political role models, because they motivate them in the same manner as female professional role models.

Despite Respondents 2 and 5 having a mixed conception about role models, female candidates can still be perceived as role models for women in the workforce. The other responses were a bit vaguer compared to Respondent 2. The respondents did not give a detailed explanation as to why they view female candidates to be role models for women. In particular, Respondent 1 declared that she does because many women are not seen in higher positions of office. Respondent 3 pointed out how it was important to see someone who has had the same experiences. This accentuates her claim that female candidates are role models given that it creates a mindset that holding positions within office is possible for women. Respondent 4 just talked about how seeing female candidates in leadership roles is not the norm. Even though the responses were more on the shorter side, it gives some confirmation of female candidates being viewed as political role models among these interviewees.

Aside from seeing respondents view female candidates as being role models for women, I observed that the role model effect may have an indirect relationship to the motivation of women running for office. It appears the presence of female political role models motivates the interviewees to run by boosting their confidence, but not by sparking their interest. I asked participants two crucial questions. These questions were: *“Have female politicians or the ones you mentioned in the previous question ever sparked an interest in you to run for office? Why or Why not?”* and *“Do you feel like having female political role models boosts your confidence to run for office?”*. What I found to be compelling was when asked about female politicians sparking an interest in her to run for office, Respondent 3 expressed how they would not spark

her interest to run. However, when she was asked about female politicians boosting her confidence to run for office, she agreed that female politicians would not only boost her confidence to run for office, but they would also motivate her to run for office.

Henceforth, while the presence of female political role models may not spark any interest to run for office among some of the women interviewed, they may boost their confidence to run for office. In addition, it verifies how the role model effect can be applied to other women instead of young women and girls. Moreover, it was interesting to see a significant shift in opinion, because it suggests that the responses are subject to change based on the context of the interview question. Therefore, the relationship surrounding the role model effect and a woman's motivation to run for office may be positive but narrow when it comes to women in the workforce. Based on the interview responses, it looks like the role model effect is slightly associated with a woman's motivation to run for office.

Regardless of my observations about the responses, there were questions that I did not fully discuss. Those questions were intended for respondents going into depth about their perceptions of both professional/political female role models. Appertaining to my research question, the study reveals it can be answered with a simple yes, but on a small-scale basis. Only two respondents agreed that female political role models would motivate them to run for office. The others were not on board with that, and Respondent 5 was indeterminate when asked this question. Most of the respondents initially indicated how female politicians would not spark an interest in them to run for office. However, when they were asked if female political role models would boost their confidence to run for office, three respondents had agreed that they would. Somewhat surprisingly, one respondent (i.e., Respondent 3) appeared to change her mind when she was asked this question along with one about whether female political role models motivate

her to run for office. In this section of the interview generally, the respondents seem to be more open to potentially wanting to run for office due to the presence of female political role models. The feelings expressed about confidence growth and female political role models motivating women into the workforce to run for office may reflect the complicated nature of the role model effect.

However, given that there was a 3/5 split in the responses to most of the interview questions, it was shown that a limited relationship might exist between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office. Overall, the study results uncover that the role model effect attributes to women putting themselves through to elections to some degree, since 40% of respondents agreed that female political role models would motivate them to run for office. Furthermore, female political role models inspired most of the interviewees to get more involved in politics rather than running for office. Therefore, the relationship involving the role model effect and the motivation for women in the workforce running for office may be somewhat limited.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office. I examined women in the workforce adding to previous research on the role model effect, which tends to focus on young women and girls rather than other groups of women. Thus, this investigation provides a different perspective for the role model effect and how it can impact a woman's motivation to run for office. The interviews revealed a complex picture of role models and the political aspirations of women in the workforce. Although there was 3/5 divide in most of the responses, my study still indicates that the role model effect may shape the motivation of women running for office for women in the workforce to some effect.

Female political role models can increase a woman's motivation in general, but not always in terms of running for office. As a result, this conveys how only some of the motivation to run for office emerges from the presence of female political role models. My results also suggest that women in the workforce may think of female political role models as important in increasing political participation, since most of the interviewees expressed that female political role models would motivate them to get more involved in politics. This is true considering that today, we see more women a part of the electoral process now more than ever before (CAWP, 2021). For the most part, my exploratory research expresses that the relationship that the role model effect has with the motivation of women running for office may be minute given that 40% of respondents agreed that female political role models would motivate them to run for office. In addition, the interviews conveyed how female political role models may not spark an interest to run but can boost confidence. Most importantly, it lays the groundwork for more research on women in the workforce as well as the impact of role models.

Despite being able to show that the role model effect may be related to the motivation of women running for office for women in the workforce to some degree, if more women would have participated, then the relationship between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office in reference to my investigation would have been examined at a massive level. This would be due to having more evidence to decipher. Therefore, there are a few ways my study could be modified. A continuation of political science research on the role model effect and women in the workforce could include a larger sample size. For example, a larger sample size could expand on the results of my study, since I chose five women. Additionally, a larger sample size would provide a lot of information given the method of in-

depth interviews where one could discover more about the role model effect and how it applies to women already in the workforce.

Future studies in this area might also include sampling women from different racial backgrounds and all age groups, because the group of female participants I interviewed were minorities and ranged from the age group of (30-55). One participant was from the age group (18-24), which is interesting, because it displays how college-aged women are counted as women in the workforce too. I desired to have a diverse group of women, because it observes the role model effect at a wide range. Furthermore, future samples could include more variance in political engagement (and prior officeholding) among the respondents. Further scholarly work analyzing the role model effect could explore subjects outside of the motivation to run for office and political engagement, including vote choice, candidate emergence, ideology as well as more groups of women.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

***AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROLE MODEL EFFECT ON
WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE***

You are invited to participate in research conducted by Courtney Lawrence, a thesis student for completion of the Political Science Master's Program at Georgia State University. The purpose of this study is to examine if the role model effect can be applied to the motivation of women running for office. With the recent emergence of female candidates and their victories in higher positions of office, it is believed that the ambition to run stems from having female political role models.

I desire to sample women in the workforce, because it provides a different perspective of the role model effect, and how it impacts the motivation of women to run for not just younger women and girls, but women who already have careers.

Your participation is completely voluntary and will remain confidential throughout the process of the study. Your engagement gives you the opportunity to express your opinions about female political role models, and if seeing them would motivate you to run for office.

If you are interested in being a part of this research project please contact me at: clawrence30@student.gsu.edu for more details, so we are able to set up a time for the in-depth interview. In addition, if you have any further comments, questions, and/or concerns feel free to contact me via email or by phone at 678-300-3362.

Thank you so much for your acknowledgment!



APPENDIX B: EMAIL TO INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS

Hello!

My name is Courtney Lawrence, and I am currently conducting research this semester for the completion of my Master's Program at Georgia State University. My research study is titled: **Is the Role Model Effect Related to the Motivation of Women Running for Office? An Investigation of the Role Model Effect on Women in the Workforce**, and I am looking for volunteers to participate in in-depth interviews via Zoom Meeting regarding women in the

workforce. If you just so happen to be interested in partaking in this project, please review and fill out the sign-up form and informed consent form below. Thank you so much for your contribution.

Interview Sign Up Form:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc1R5Zpk_ZNfvVGQEDMPFS0iAFw10Dfd4ztvLdN9PoI0Sa3Jw/viewform?usp=sf_link

Informed Consent Form:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ICu_vvPCR3Yk4qtcugnUyCXIU0mLru9TIVg-TljfcU/edit?usp=sharing

Sincerely,

Courtney Lawrence

Appendix B.1: Interview Sign Up Sheet

Interview Sign Up Sheet

Background Information: I am conducting research focusing on the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office. I wish to sample women who are currently in the workforce to participate in an in-depth interview to share their opinions on female political role models and would that compel them to run for office. If you are interested in participating in this interview, please fill out the questions below.

* Required

Would you like to participate in the in-depth interview via zoom? *

- Yes, I would
- No, I would not

Which day of the week do you prefer to have the interview? *

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday

- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

What time of day do you prefer? *

- Morning (9am-11am)
- Mid-day (12pm- 2pm)
- Afternoon (2pm - 4pm)
- Late Afternoon (4pm- 6pm)

What is your first name?

What is your profession?

What is the best email address to reach you at?

Comments and/or questions and concerns

SUBMIT

Appendix B.2: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: Is the Role Model Effect Related to the Motivation of Women Running for Office? An Investigation of the Role Model Effect on Women in the Workforce

Investigator: Courtney Lawrence

Committee Chair: Dr. Sarah Gershon

Committee Chair Email: sgershon@gsu.edu

Investigator Phone: 678-300-3362

Investigator Email: clawrence30@student.gsu.edu

Georgia State University

In fully agreeing to participate in an in-depth interview, it is imperative that you review and fill out this document outlining the purpose, procedures, confidentiality, risks, benefits, costs, and withdrawal of this qualitative research study.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to discover if there is a relationship between the role model effect and the motivation of women running for office.

PROCEDURES: You were invited to participate in in-depth interviews designed to observe if the role model effect pertains to a woman's motivation to run for office. The results from this study will be incorporated in my thesis research paper this semester. Upon filling out the interview sign up form and providing your consent, The investigator will send an email with details regarding your interview such as the date and time. The interviews will be conducted on a one-on-one basis expected to last 30 to 60 minutes for the purpose of asking follow-up questions, you as respondents' providing your answers, and the investigator ensuring that she has all your responses. The interviews are intended to be **AUDIO-RECORDED** via a smartphone device; however, you will have the option to choose whether you agree or disagree with being audio-recorded. This is so everyone who was willing to participate can without having an issue with being recorded. There are checkboxes listed below for each of you to either agree or disagree

with having your responses be recorded. For those of you who are not comfortable with being audio-recorded, the investigator will take handwritten notes to record your responses. During each interview process, I will follow an interview script for the sake of making sure that the interviews were carried out in an orderly fashion. Once each interview has concluded, the investigator will send a thank you email expressing their appreciation for those who agreed to participate. The investigator will type up all recorded and handwritten responses in Word documents. In addition to that, all recorded/ handwritten responses along with consent forms will be stored in separate personal document files with the use of your first names that will only be viewed by the investigator and destroyed after the research is completed.

CONFIDENTIALITY: To ensure that you remain confidential, all responses/consent forms will be stored in personal document files using your first names that only the investigator will have access to as well as review. After the results have been collected and the research is completed, all responses along with consent forms will be destroyed. In terms of my thesis paper, the investigator will aggregate the results based on the responses to the questions, unless the investigator is specifically highlighting what you as a participant says. In that case, the investigator will include a direct quote with the use of a pseudonym such as Respondent 1. If anything within this study interferes with your confidentiality, all information that is bound to disclose your identity will be destroyed immediately upon recognition.

RISKS: Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, this study will be conducted solely through a Zoom Meeting, and you can contact the investigator or committee chair by email and/or phone if needed. Each participant will not experience any more risks in participating in this study than they would on a day-to-day basis.

BENEFITS: The study is expected to examine the influence of role models in the political arena, and how the role model effect can be applied to women in the workforce. It also represents the opportunity for participants to share their opinions and perceptions on the progression of women in politics.

COSTS: There are no costs for participation in the study. This is something that is completely voluntary and does not require payment to participate.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT JUDGMENT/ PENALTY: Again, this is something that is completely voluntary, so you are free to withdraw your consent or discontinue your participation in the study at any time. If it just so happens that you desire to withdraw your consent or discontinue with your participation, the investigator would like to ask that you please notify her via email at: clawrence30@student.gsu.edu or by phone at: [678-300-3362](tel:678-300-3362). This way, she can discard all information provided and would thank you for your acknowledgment of the research. Following withdrawal/discontinuity to participate in this study, you as participants will

not be subjected to any form of judgment nor penalty, because it is morally wrong and does not belong to the concepts implicated in the research itself.

QUESTIONS: For any questions, comments, or concerns that you may have feel free to contact the investigator by email at: clawrence30@student.gsu.edu or by phone at: [678-300-3362](tel:678-300-3362) as well as the committee chair by email at: sgershon@gsu.edu. Both members will try to get back with each participant in a timely manner.

***All copies of the consent forms as well as responses either recorded or handwritten from every participant will be stored in personal document files with the use of your first name and destroyed after research is completed.**

If you agree to participate in the study, please check one of the boxes below and sign the form.

☐

Yes, I agree to be audio-recorded

☐

No, I do not agree to be audio-

recorded

First Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant:

Email Address of Participant:

Date:

APPENDIX C: EMAIL ABOUT ZOOM INTERVIEW

Hello Participant!

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research study. I greatly appreciate your contribution as well as your time and effort. I have received your response regarding the interview sign up form, so your Zoom interview shall take place on (date) at (time). Below is a link to the Zoom Meeting that is expected to last 30 to 60 minutes, even though it might go a little bit over due to asking follow-up questions, providing your answers, and ensuring that I have all your responses. All your responses either recorded or written along with your consent forms will be stored in a personal document file for my access and review only and will be destroyed after the research is completed. If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation, feel free to contact me via email and/or phone at: [678-300-3362](tel:678-300-3362). I will attempt to get back with you in a timely manner. In addition, if at any time you would like to withdraw your consent or discontinue with your participation, please notify me. Thank you so much for your participation, and I hope you have a wonderful day.

Your ZOOM MEETING shall commence on

Zoom Link:

Sincerely,

Courtney Lawrence

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Interview Script

Investigator/Interviewer: Courtney Lawrence

Committee Chair: Dr. Sarah Gershon

Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to join in this discussion. You were invited here today to share your thoughts about if you look at female candidates to be role models and would that motivate you to run for office.

Interviewer Introduction

First, I would like to start off by introducing myself: Hello, my name is Courtney Lawrence, and I am a Master's Student at Georgia State University. I am conducting this research for the purpose of completing my program and earning my Master's Degree in Political Science. The information collected today will be incorporated in my thesis paper, which will be published at the end of this semester.

Before we begin, I would like to reiterate a few procedures outlined in the informed consent form that you signed prior to receiving the details of the interview. We will record our session today using my smartphone device. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded I would like to ask that you, please speak now. All information provided along with your responses will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

Please keep in mind that you have the right to withdraw from our discussion at any time should you feel the need to do so without judgment or penalty. This session is expected to last 30 to 60 minutes, but it might go a little over due to providing your responses to each question and ensuring that I have all your answers.

Now before we get started, I have some final notes to ensure that our discussion moves along smoothly:

1. I will guide the conversation by asking you questions and providing you with enough time to answer them.
2. I will remain silent until you have fully answered each question to make sure that my device is able to record your responses. Again, voice recordings only apply to those who agreed to be audio-recorded otherwise I will take notes regarding your responses.
3. I will be respectful of your opinion despite whether I agree or disagree. This is meant to be a discussion not a debate.
4. There are no right or wrong answers, just your opinion.
5. This is a safe and confidential setting, so feel free to express yourself.
6. Are there any further questions before we get started?

Let's get started!

Questions:

First, I would like to learn more about your perception of professional female role models based on your experience in the workforce.

1. Do you think that it is important to have professional female role models in the workforce? How so?
2. What is your profession?
3. What led you to pursue that profession? Was there anyone that inspired you or someone that you looked up to pursue this career path? Were they a female? If so, in what ways did they inspire you?
4. Has a professional female role model/ role models ever encouraged you to achieve any goals or helped you overcome any challenges within the workplace? If so, what were those goals? What were those challenges?

Next, I would like to learn more about your views on female role models in terms of politics.

5. Given the recent election cycles, how do you feel about more female candidates running for elective office or actually holding higher positions of office?
6. Do you characterize female candidates as being role models for women in general? Why or why not?
7. Do you have any female politicians that you look up to? If so, who are they and why?

Lastly, I would like to see if female political role models would motivate you to run for office.

8. Have you ever planned to run for office?
9. Have female politicians or the ones you mentioned in the previous question ever sparked an interest in you to run for office? Why or Why not?
10. Do you feel like having female political role models boosts your confidence to run for office?
11. Do you think having female political role models would motivate you to run for office?

Thank you for all your answers to my questions. And that concludes our session for today. I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day again to meet and participate in my research. I hope you have a wonderful rest of your day.

APPENDIX E: THANK YOU EMAIL

Thank You Email

Hello!

I would like to thank you all for participating in my qualitative study. I extremely appreciate all the time and effort that you put in to answer these questions. I wish you the best, and if you would like a final copy of the thesis chapter outlining the results from the study feel free to let me know. Thank you so much again for your contribution.

Sincerely,

Courtney Lawrence

FOOTNOTES

1 See “By the Numbers” section on the Represent Women Parity for Women in Politics website at: https://www.representwomen.org/current-women-representation#us_overview. Source: Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University (CAWP).

2 See “Gender Inequality in the Workplace: The Experience of Female Administrators”. Source: Jessica Johnson (2018).

3 Shown in *The Washington Post* article “How women candidates are making girls feel better about politics”.

4 Data was presented in Sarah Kuta’s (2018) article of “Women who run for office inspire others to do the same, study suggests”. Source: OpenSecrets.org.

5 The article “125 won their elections” in *The Washington Post* shows the results from the 2018 election.

6 *The Washington Post* (2018)

7 The results were displayed in “Women in Leadership: A European Business Imperative” an empirical study. Source: The Catalyst and Conference Board (2002)

8 The percentages of employed workers were illustrated in “The narrowing, but persistent, gender gap in pay”. Source: Pew Research Center. Nikki Graf, Anna Brown, & Eileen Patten, Eileen. (2019).

9 See “The narrowing, but persistent, gender gap in pay” created by NIKKI GRAF, ANNA BROWN AND EILEEN PATTEN, because it describes the forms of discrimination and how that can have an impact on the wage earnings between men and women.

10 “The Motivational Theory of Role Modeling: How Role Models Influence Role Aspirants’ Goals” explains how role models can change the perception of goals and goal-related behaviors. Source: Thekla Morgenroth, Michelle K. Ryan, & Kim Peters (2015).

11 Appendix A

12 I attempted to sample 20 female participants. Potential subjects declined for various reasons including but not limited to their work schedules.

13 Appendix B

14 Appendix B.1 & B.2

15 Appendix C

16 Appendix D

17 Appendix D

18 Appendix E